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ABSTRACT

One of 10 studies commissioned to investigate research needs and to stimulate planning activities, this paper claims that we know little about the language needs of all Americans, and argues that our real concern should be one of direction, not one of money. Although the need to communicate with the rest of the world has emerged as the most challenging educational policy issue of our day, educators at all levels still await direction concerning the future language needs of today's youth. It is also argued that, from the standpoint of policy, our approach to language learning has been unorganized and disconnected. It advocates that the National Institute of Education take the lead in exploring the policy implications of making foreign language and bilingual education part of a broader effort to prepare America for internationalization, and in a national experiment in strategic language planning. It is suggested that the following be addressed: (1) developments in business and commerce: (2) shifts in the role of government: (3) the role of educational systems and intermediate systems: (4) reshaping of language programs by other countries: (5) laws, administrative regulations, and practices, and (6) educational organizations in cooperation with public and private organizations. (Author/AMH)

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MEETING AMERICA'S LANGUAGE NEEDS:

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

AND

BILINGUAL EDUCATION

BY

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Examining language as a policy concern tempts one to begin with a discussion of such issues as social justice, human rights, international law and majority/minority interests. The temptation is great, in fact, because these matters very much affect our thinking about language and language groups in this country.[1] But the aim of this discussion is to hold off dissecting the notion of social justice in favor of addressing a more pragmatic question: to what extent do we as Americans actually need languages other than English?

Recent debates have brought attention to the appropriateness of promoting languages other than English in our schools. Because of the budget-cutting activities of the present administration and Congress, these debates about language have become dramatizations of how - and sometimes if - tax dollars should be spent. A more dispassionate view, however, underscores the fact that we still know little about the language needs of Americans - all Americans. Our real concern should be the lack of direction not the lack of money. The research and dissemination mandate for the National Institute of Education (NIE) makes it a likely agency to assist educational policy makers in finding that direction. Schools require new leadership in this area. Different languages and the groups they represent have influenced curriculum plans, testing procedures,

and staffing patterns. This experience has raised more questions than answers, and the important ones probe America's future role in the world. Meanwhile, educators and the colleges that help prepare them await direction concerning the requirements of young people in meeting the demands of the future.

IS ENGLISH ENOUGH?

Geoffrey Barraclough, the eminent British historian, has observed that our world is undergoing vast changes because of technological development or modernization. He notes that countries like China, which for centuries actively resisted the affects of westernization, are recognizing the need to become more modern.

> "What I have against many anthropologists is that they seem to think culture is static. They say, particularly about primitive cultures, that they have always been the same for years. But culture is always undergoing modification. Leaders of developing countries want to 'get rid of the West'. The West is always going to be there; they can't get rid of it."[2]

This reckoning with modernization requires that countries become more international. And that, in turn, forces governments to deal with the matter of communication. How can a country become more international if it cannot communicate with other nations? It cannot. In other countries the learning of languages in addition to the native tongue has become

associated wuth technological development and social progress.

This fact, interestingly enough, has piqued the interest of private industry. When Canadian firms, for example, hesitantly explored the monetary returns of doing business in French speaking sectors, they found a ready and willing market. Crash courses in French taught in some firms had salespeople fluent enough to close deals in six weeks.[3] These same firms discovered that French opened a new European market to them. Similar illustrations have surfaced in Indonesia, Latin America and parts of Western Europe.[4] The most telling example is Japan.

Japanese tradition and culture survives amidst the country's bold committment to modernization. It is true that more Mc Donald's hamburgers are consumed in Japan than in any other Asian country. Yet national demands keep the loyalty to Japanese values strong. Industry, for example, frowns on education obtained outside of the country.[5] The concern is that graduates of western universities lose sight of Japan's cultural uniqueness and national priorities. Despite this concern, however, the Japanese are most anxious to do business in the western world. To promote this, businessmen are encouraged to study other languages and cultures. A growing number of business men and women are representing Japanese companies in the United States. Virtually all of them speak

English. The impact of these people on the U.S. economy is significant. Even casual observers of the auto industry will confirm this. For Japan, then, modernization need not mean total westernization - just a committment to learning and using the tools of the trade.

Unlike Japan, American companies have resisted the trend toward internationalization. There are exceptions, but for the most part U.S. firms have tended to rely on foreign nationals to conduct business in other countries.[6] And to conduct such business is a must. Never before in our country's history has the need and opportunity to explore foreign markets been so great. The economic development of other countries brings not only increased competition but also new and better subsidized consumers. Americans are learning this lesson painfully. Reliance on foreign nationals is a necessary but temporary stopgap. Exemplified best by the information processing industry, business now grows at a frightful pace making specialization critical. This fact together with the development of international markets means that success will go to those who possess technical skills and knowledge of other languages and culture.

The harsh reality is that Americans are unprepared to meet the challenge of internationalization. Where others are firm, well toned, we are saggy and out of shape. This discussion has fo-

cused thus far on the economic aspects of foreign language learning. The pocket book is almost everyone's bottom line. But languages other than English affect other aspects of our lives. Advancement of scientific research, provision of health care and personal edification are some expamles. Still, Americans fare poorly in the learning of languages. Even our collective proficiency in English is questionable. What accounts for this?

U.S. ATTITUDES ON LANGUAGE LEARNING - WHY ARE WE OUT OF TOUCH WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD?

A recent survey of American attitudes toward language learning indicated that at least half of all Americans wished they spoke a language in addition to English. An even greater proportion af Americans (84%) expressed a desire for their children to learn another language.[7] When juxtaposed with our general lack of mastery in foreign languages this attitude is puzzling. Our actions belie our words; either we don't mean what we say or we don't know how to teach language. If we allow ourselves the benefit of doubt, then our attention must turn to the way we teach languages. Two language teaching efforts are worthy of our attention: foreign language teaching and bilingual education.

Foreign Language Teaching

The most common approach to foreign language teaching involves

presenting the target language as a second language. In the United States this means that minimal English language skills are used as the foundation upon which to build new syntactical structures (i.e. comparative analysis) and vocabulary resources. The approach assumes, for example, that a student can read in English and transfer that skill to another language. Exceptions to this approach includes courses designed to develop aural/oral skills alone (e.g. some conversation classes) and the teaching of languages which do not employ the English alphabet although many instructors rely on English phonics to teach the pronunciation of written symbols.

Perhaps our society puts excessive responsibility for the general ignorance of foreign languages on the backs of teachers and their methodologies. One thing is clear, however, few people who experience foreign language classes in U.S. public schools can claim fluency in the target language. This trend, moreover, has not gone unnoticed.

In 1958, Congress entrusted the federal government with the responsibility of promoting the study of foreign languages and international affairs. Prompted by Russian advances in aerospace research, Congress injected money into colleges and universities for the partial support of students willing to pursue appropriate majors. The legislation, known as the

National Defense Education Act (NDEA) managed to attract initial attention but did not contribute to continued interest in meeting a national need. The purpose of NDEA quickly fell out of public view. Institutions of higher education tended for the most part to use NDEA funds as another source of miscellaneous financial aid for needy students.[8] We had not yet perceived a real need to meet the rest of the world half way.

Initial negotiations over NDEA misjudged our perception of need and failed to include provisions for a massive documentation effort concerning the need to dedicate ourselves to foreign languages and international studies. While the federal government found institutions to accept the additional student assistance monies, it underestimated public awareness of NDEA's purpose and need. As a result, America has not equiped itself with new language tools.

The study of foreign language and international studies in public schools traditionally has been the investigation of far off lands, cultures and people. This element of distance has transformed such studies into the pursuit of curious information applicable to life only in the most abstract and/or theoretical sense. Dialogues and descriptions of Spanish windmills, Israeli folkdances and Chinese dragons are examples of limited efforts.

This approach has two specific consequences: 1) students as a whole fail to recognize that our contemporary world is shrinking due to communications technology and multi-national enterprises, and 2) linguistic minority students in particular are not encouraged to assume a role of leadership in promoting foreign languages and international studies. The President's Commission of Foreign Languages and International Studies (CFLIS) summarizes this latter consequence as follows:

> "The melting pot tradition that denigrates immigrants' maintenance of their skill to speak their native tongue still lingers, and this unfortunately causes linguistic minorities at home to be ignored as a political asset...a comprehensive language policy ought to recognize this important national resource."[9]

Bilingual Education

The needs of linguistic minorities in the U.S. have invited the participation of the courts and a variety of monitoring agencies in educational decisionmaking. One result has been the development of bilingual education. Conceptually bilingual education differs from foreign language teaching in that it does not assume the possession of minimal skills in the first language. Illustrated most vividly by the bulk of Indochinese refugees, ability to speak a language need not be accompanied by literacy skills. As a result, bilingual educators have focused energies and resources on providing students with basic skills in the native language.

The theory behind this approach is not unlike that of foreign language teaching - a second language can be acquired more easily once the first language skills are developed. Keep in mind that literacy skills are the concern here. We know that young pre-schoolers can acquire other languages with relative ease. But how well can they function in school? Bilingual education has maintained that students first need grounding in their native language and that these skills can be transfered or applied to learning English as a second language. The most controversial aspect of this approach has been the employment of other languages as means of instruction.

Proponents of bilingual education have argued that students whose mother tongue is other than English cannot be allowed to fall behind in other subject matters. And so, math is being taught in Spanish,Chinese, Vietnamese and countless other languages. In addition to the educational concern for students falling behind, many bilingual educators also find inherent good in helping students maintain their native language. This issue more than any other has drawn some observers of bilingual education to take exception.

A popular response to the maintenance notion within bilingual education is the assertion that while all people have the right to retain native languages, there is no public responsibility

to promote that right with tax dollars. Noel Epstein, an analyst of social policy puts it this way:

> "The central issue would not be the unquestioned importance of ethnicity in individuals' lives, any more than it would be the unquestioned importance of religion in individuals' lives. Nor would it be about the right or the desirability of groups to maintain their languages and cultures. The question would be the federal role. Is it a federal responsibility to finance and promote student attachments to their ethnic languages and cultures, jobs long left to families, religious groups, ethnic organizations, private schools, ethnic publications and others?"[10]

Epstein addresses his own question by distinguishing between an approach which teaches "each about every" and that which instructs "you about yours". According to Epstein, "'each about every' means to define language maintenance programs as a way of sustaining and building valuable national language resources, opening other worlds to all".[11] This approach, he says, could be manageable, cost effective and free of social and political issues. But Epstein argues against public responsibility for group maintenance of language and culture (i.e. "you about yours"), capitalizing upon a currently popular view: why should the government pay for programs or otherwise involve itself in the affairs of family, church or community? To the extent that foreign language learning is considered a private matter, Epstein's argument has much

validity. Difficulty begins when the learning of foreign languages possesses obvious benefits for the general public welfare. If national security and economic survival are at stake, then shouldn't the public share some of the moral and financial responsibility for language learning?

Epstein does not overlook our language needs. He favors developing native and target language literacy by continuing with foreign language classes throughout the student's career; he also expresses a willingness to try experimental programs such as the second language "immersion" approach for English-speaking children. The expectation of success for these efforts is unrealistic. Epstein proposes a foreign language curriculum not unlike our past efforts to promote languages other than English. Even if we extend the amount of instruction time devoted to foreign language teaching, prior experience has taught us that students who have no opportunity to employ the target language beyond the classroom (diglossic norms) do not retain language skills.[12] We need only to reflect on our own experiences in French, German and Spanish classes to underscore this point.

More importantly, Epstein's willingness to experiment with language learning programs misjudges contemporary attitudes towards foreign language learning. People experiment when a perception of need exists; necessity is still the unchallenged

mother of invention. But our citizens currently feel no such need. Indeed, how could our people really learn about this need? All are products of our own foreign language and world geography classes. Epstein assumes that we as a nation have overcome the deficiencies of our education and have evolved to appreciate what other countries long have recognized as vital to survival: the ability to communicate with the rest of the world. This assumption is unfounded.

To return to our original question: is it poor teaching methods or closed attitudes which account for our linguistic poverty? We have learned that eight out of ten Americans with children encourage them to learn a foreign language. Yet most Americans haven't taken the trouble to learn another language. Both inadequate teaching methods and our failure to perceive a need for other languages contribute to this. There was a time when such a need was less critical; the ineffectiveness of our teaching was not felt. But times have changed. We no longer can afford the luxury of dabbling in a language. Our approach to language learning must be strategic.

STRATEGIC LANGUAGE LEARNING

Our need to communicate with the rest of the world is the most challenging educational policy issue of our day. As a

nation we have underestimated the importance of this need. Recent developments in international relations like the Iran crisis or the Japanese influence on the auto industry suggest that we have overestimated our ability to respond to the demands of a changing world. The situation is serious but not bleak. Commitment and action are the remedy. Our experiences in both foreign language teaching and bilingual education have taught us much about how people - children and adults - learn language. We have not given adequate attention to the collection and analysis of lessons from these experiences. From the standpoint of policy our approach to language learning has been unorganized and disconnected. The President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies, for example, failed to emphasize the obvious connections between foreign language teaching and bilingual education in its recent report. This oversight is indicative of the current state of educational thought. We don't look beyond the boundaries of our content areas.

Both foreign language teachers and bilingual educators have adopted parochial stances in education. People take care of their own. Maybe this trend suggests political sophistication but it hasn't met our needs. Our lack of preparedness in language learning is nothing short of an embarassment. And, more importantly, it is hurting us where it counts: our strength in world politics and our pocketbook.

Responding to our national language needs not only requires that we overcome our parochialism, it also demands that we develop a genuine willingness to learn from the experience of others. Despite all the controversies surrounding bilingual education, for example, its supporters have attempted to teach us to respect and learn from the experiences of linguistic minorities. This is no mean thing. We Americans are not accustomed to seeking the advice of others. This reluctance has something to do with our image of America as great and the accompanying fear of losing that greatness. To confront our language learning needs we must let go of our compulsive sense of loss. According to Cohen, we have accomplished little in the way of social policy needs by relying on a sense of loss as a rationale for progress.[13] Fear of losing military strength, national pride and traditional family values may make for some interesting politics but it has not contributed to sound policy. Perhaps, as Cohen suggests, we moderns are socialized to think in terms of longing for the past. Yet the challenge we face is to shift from a loss mentality to an acceptance of our interdependent relationship with the rest of the world. We should explore the policy implications of making foreign language teaching and bilingual education part of a broader effort to prepare America for internationalization: a national experiment in strategic language learning. This exploration is a fitting task for N.I.E.

RECOMMENDATIONS

N.I.E. should take the lead in examining the policy implications of a national language preparedness program. Within the scope of this work, the following questions should be addressed.

I. What are the specific factors, variables and trends which will affect the language needs of Americans?

A. Which developments in business and commerce will influence the shaping of language needs?

Examples:

1. To what extent will industry's energy requirements be a factor in determining communication needs?
2. How will world trade agreements influence language learning priorities?
3. What effects will the rapidly growing information processing technology have on international communication needs?

B. How will shifts in the role of government influence the determination of language priorities?

Examples:

1. Does greater emphasis on military defense carry with it the implicit mandate to prepare significantly more Americans for communication with world powers? If so, which languages are

the priorities?

2. How will increased attention on international relations in other governmental sectors (e.g. land management) affect the demand for personnel with knowledge of foreign languages and international studies?
3. Where are linguistic groups concentrated? How can local governments utilize concentrations of linguistic minorities in the promotion of strategic languages?
4. What and where are the demands for languages other than English in domestic programs?

C. What role will educational systems play in determining language needs?

Examples:

1. In what ways can colleges and universities keep abreast of shifting priorities in national language needs and encourage greater cooperation between foreign language departments and schools of education?
2. How can intermediate systems, such as state or county offices of education, develop the means to provide information on changing language needs to local schools on the one hand and business and government on the other?
3. What do we know about identifying language

needs at the individual level? How can local schools make use of the lessons we have learned from teaching languages (e.g. language assessments, staffing patterns or role of family) and become more effective in identifying the language needs of individuals and communities?

II. What types of educational policies will meet the language needs of Americans?

A. How have other countries reshaped their language education programs in light of the need to promote more than one language?

Examples:

1. What are the specific experiences of countries with multilingual language policies?
2. How has immigration flow made a difference?
3. In what ways do government and industry cooperate to foster language learning in all sectors of society?
4. What are the attitudes of people faced with the need to maintain multilingual proficiencies?

B. To what extent does <u>our</u> society recognize and reward the acquisition of languages other than English?

Examples:

1. Are our laws compatible with the need for strategic language learning?

2. What specific benefits - economic, social or educational - are there in bilingualism?
3. To what extent has government and industry invested in strategic language learning?

C. Are certain segments of our society affected by our lack of preparedness in critical or unique ways?

Examples:

1. How has the existence of sizeable minority language groups affected or impacted on the provision of health care?
2. Are certain industries feeling the effects of our language limitations in special ways? How have firms responded to these effects?
3. How have school climates (e.g. board policies, staff attitudes, student behaviors or parent participation) been affected by the influx of minority language groups?

D. How can educational systems at all levels cooperate with other public and private organizations in meeting the language needs of all Americans?

NOTES

1. For a helpful discussion on these issues see Reynaldo F. Macias, "Choice of Language as a Human Right - Public Policy Implications in the U.S." in R.V. Padilla (ed.), Bilingual Education and Public Policy in the U.S., Ypsilanti, Michigan: Eastern Michigan University, 1979.

2. Geoffrey Barraclough, "The Limits of Westernization", World Press Review, Volume 28, No. 3 (March 1981), p. 25.

3. See Raymond E. Castro, "Shifting the Burden of Bilingualism", The Bilingual Review, Volume 3, Nos. 1 & 2 (August 1976) for a more detailed treatment of Canada's experience with French.

4. Joan Rubin, "The Approach to Language Planning Within the United States", Language Planning Newsletter, Volume 4, No. 4 (November 1978).

5. Refer to "Cultural Values", Santa Rosa Press Democrat, February 15, 1981, p. 18.

6. Interview with Joan Rubin, February 11, 1981.

7. Peter A. Eddy, "Foreign Languages in the U.S.A.: A National Survey of American Attitudes and Experience", Modern Language Journal, Spring 1980.

8. See Chapter 8 of S. Bowles and H. Gintis, Schooling in Capitalistic America, New York: Basic Books, 1976.

9. Strength Through Wisdom - A Report to the President from the Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies (CFLIS), U.S. Government Printing Office, November 1979, p. 6.

10. Noel Epstein, Language, Ethnicity and the Schools, Washington D.C.: IEL, 1977, page 7.

11. Ibid, page 6.

12. See Richard T. Thompson, "New Directions in Foreign Language Study", Annals, AAPSS, No. 449 (May 1980).

13. David K. Cohen, "Loss as a Theme in Social Policy", Harvard Educational Review, Volume 46. No. 4 (November 1976), page 570.